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5 February 1965

DCI BRIEFING  
FOR THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

SOUTH VIETNAM

I. The latest change of governments in South Vietnam may now have brought this chronically unstable situation to an unusually critical level.

A. The political pot in Saigon is boiling;

Viet Cong main force units may have been regrouping for intensified new attacks after the holiday; and we have evidence of a Communist build-up in the northern provinces which may include a headquarters element of a regular North Vietnamese unit.

II. General Khanh, with the concurrence of the Armed Forces Council, forced the Huong government out of office on January 27 on grounds that it had shown itself incapable of dealing with the Buddhist demonstrations. (Actually it appears that Huong would have dealt more firmly with the demonstrations if the military had given him the support he wanted.)

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- A. Khanh now is engaged in putting together a new regime. The outlines are not yet firm, but they center on a joint military-civilian council which is to represent all regions and all four religions, and a national assembly election tentatively set for March 21.
1. The elections--if they are held at all, and there are hints of postponement--are likely to be carefully controlled, especially in insecure areas. The election law suggests that they may be rigged to give the military a strong voice in the new assembly.
  2. The proposed national assembly will need a two-thirds majority to oust a premier. It could, however, provide at least the semblance of a public mandate which recent governments have lacked.
  3. The exact role of the military-civilian council is unclear. Catholic leaders, suspicious of a possible alignment between Khanh and the Buddhists, are reserved about participation.
  4. In the interim, Suu has remained as Chief of State, and Khanh has picked

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as acting Premier, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, better known to Americans as "Jack Owen"--an economist who has spent most of the last two decades in the United States.

III. Khanh seems to be determined to manipulate the formation of the new regime to strengthen his own power position, whether or not he actually holds a title in the government.

A. He has more opponents now, however, than at any time since he replaced General Minh.

There is a strong possibility that he will overreach himself and bring on new disorders.

1. His critics argue either that he aspires to be a "De Gaulle" and run an authoritarian regime, or wants to be Vietnam's "Sihanouk" and neutralize the country.

2. They appear to be agreed, however, that he must not be permitted to regain full power.

B. Khanh claims to have a written agreement with Buddhist leaders that they will refrain from demonstrations against the new regime, and that some of their more controversial

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figures will leave the country. There is already evidence, however, that the Buddhist hierarchy will not honor any such commitments.

1. Buddhist leaders have told us repeatedly that they do not trust Khanh. They touched off the disorders last August which kept him from installing an authoritarian military regime.
2. The Buddhists have never made it clear just what they do want, but they obviously feel that their part in removing President Diem entitles them to at least a veto over the composition of any government.
3. Their public position consists of demands that the government should not be anti-Buddhist, and should not be tainted by members associated with the Diem regime. We have some reports that they want at least two portfolios in the new cabinet, including the Ministry of Interior.

C. Khanh's other opponents fear that there really is a working agreement between Khanh and the

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Buddhists, and that it is aimed at neutralizing South Vietnam.

1. Some of the "Young Turk" generals who saved Khanh from a coup last September have told us they will eventually have to dump Khanh as commander-in-chief, and that this will be done immediately if he makes an obvious move to resume personal power. This sentiment also appears strong among field-grade officers, one group of whom reportedly was thwarted in a coup attempt on 4 February.
2. The air force chief and the general commanding the Saigon Military District have both said new Buddhist demonstrations will not be tolerated.
3. Dai Viet and Catholic officers in the military are showing increased readiness to move against Khanh.
4. Some of the inveterate plotters like Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao have been trying to line up officers and troops for a coup, or assassination attempt against Khanh.

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IV. Ever since France pulled out of Indochina in 1954, the Communists have been waging a relentless and gradually mounting effort to get the southern half of Vietnam.

(MAPS, SVN 1959, 1961, 1963)  
(MAP, SVN 1964)

- A. I have here two maps which measure the progress of that Communist effort. The red in each case shows areas where the Viet Cong predominate.
1. If you will look at the uppermost of the three smaller maps on the right, you can see that in 1959, five years after Dien Bien Phu, the Communists were established in only half a dozen isolated and relatively small spots--Viet Minh bases which the GVN never recovered.
  2. In another five years, however--by the end of 1964--the Viet Cong holdings had mushroomed all over the map. Today the Communists have the upper hand over a greater area in South Vietnam than the Saigon government does, although some of this area is sparsely settled.

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- V. In the period from July 1954 through 1959, the Viet Cong simply were not strong enough to pose a direct threat to the central government in Saigon.
- A. The Communists had left some 10,000 stay-behind agents in the South, in violation of the Geneva Agreements calling for the withdrawal of all Viet Minh forces to the North.
- B. Hanoi, preoccupied with building a Communist state after eight years of fighting the French, was counting on the total collapse of central authority in Saigon within a year or two.
- C. Instead, the administration of Ngo Dinh Diem successfully established its authority over disruptive internal forces, and was able to resist pressures from Hanoi. By 1959, despite some Communist terrorism in outlying areas, Diem had developed a considerable nationwide support apparatus, although he apparently did not have predominant public support.
- VI. In 1959, North Vietnam made a major reappraisal and decided to embark on full-scale guerrilla

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warfare to undermine Diem's administrative apparatus.

- A. At the same time, resentment was growing in South Vietnam over Diem's personal aloofness and his authoritarian tendencies, including the suppression of political opposition. The resentment came from urban politicians and intellectuals, who were few in number, but articulate. They gave rise to echoes among the military, in the information media, and among interested foreign elements.
- B. When trouble with the Buddhists broke out in May 1963, the Ngo family's reliance on increasingly harsh measures to save its regime finally led six months later to Diem's overthrow by military officers who had long argued that the war against the Viet Cong was being lost politically.
- C. Since the fall of Diem, the picture has been one of successive and overlapping power struggles between and among civilian politicians and military leaders, few of them with any appreciable public following, few of them with any constructive alternative to the regime of the moment. The

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scramble for authority in Saigon persists today to the detriment of provincial administration, pacification, and the war effort. The South Vietnamese, it appears, have learned only how to unite against something; they have not yet learned how to unite for positive programs and goals.

VII. A few graphic statistics may underline the progress of the Viet Cong guerrilla effort.

(CHART, Viet Cong Main Forces)

A. In early 1960, the Viet Cong had an estimated strength of 3,000 to 5,000 regulars, backed up by an unknown number of partially armed partisans. The largest units were companies and platoons, operating locally under direction of political committees.

(MAP, South Vietnam with Order of Battle overlay)

B. Today, they have an estimated 33,000 in their main force units--this in the face of Saigon's claims that the Viet Cong lose 20 to 30 thousand men a year.

C. They have regimental commands--five of them. We know of 47 battalions, which are beginning to engage in coordinated actions at regimental strength.

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- D. The main force is backed up by an estimated 60 to 80 thousand irregulars, some of them farmers by day and guerrillas by night.
- E. Weapons captured from the Viet Cong show that they have increasing numbers of weapons coming from the Bloc and from China through North Vietnam, including machine-guns for antiaircraft use, and some mortars and recoilless rifles. Some of these weapons come down the infiltration trails through Laos, and we think some are shipped by sea from North Vietnam to the delta.
1. Some weapons, medicine, and explosives are smuggled in from Cambodia.

(CHART, Communist infiltration)

VIII. This chart shows the growth of infiltration from North Vietnam. About 100,000 Vietnamese of southern origin, about 80 thousand of them Viet Minh troops, withdrew to North Vietnam in 1954. We calculate that by 1960, 45,000 of them might have remained fit for guerrilla warfare.

- A. For the period from 1959 through last October, we have confirmed evidence of 19,000 infiltrations, and some evidence which would account for as many as 34,000.

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B. Most of the men known to have been infiltrated in 1964 are northerners by birth. This suggests firstly that Hanoi may be running out of native southerners fit for guerrilla warfare, and secondly that Hanoi is no longer very concerned about concealing its direction and support of the supposedly indigenous Viet Cong.

(CHART, SVN Armed Forces Manpower)

C. On the government side, the strength of the armed forces is still below planned levels, but it is climbing. This chart shows that the regular forces have risen from about 150,000 in 1957 to 227,000 at the end of 1964. The paramilitary forces in the same period have gone from about 100,000 to some 265,000, so that the total strength is virtually doubled.

(CHART, SVN desertions)

D. There has been a fluctuating but persistent desertion problem, which at the moment appears to be under control. Last year there were more than 66,000 desertions, nearly three-fourths of them from the paramilitary forces.

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1. The desertion rate rises to some degree in response to Viet Cong victories and political crises in Saigon, but it also reflects the seasons when the men feel they are needed at home to help with the farming.

IX. That may sound casual, but I want to emphasize that the fighting in Vietnam is bloody. It is not just a matter of one side firing a few shots in the air, and the opponent withdrawing. It is a war of raids and ambushes, but there are beginning to be substantial pitched battles.

(CHART, SVN War Casualties)

A. On this chart, I call your attention to the lower dotted lines--the killed in action, the casualties that count when it comes to putting a Viet Cong out of action permanently.

1. Government casualties have risen steadily since the fighting began in 1960, and amounted to nearly 75 hundred killed in action last year.
2. In 1964, an estimated 17 thousand Viet Cong were killed in action. The reason

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for the sharp drop after the 1962 and 1963 figures is that we have insisted on stricter criteria in South Vietnamese reporting.

3. The South Vietnamese argue that many dead are carried away by the retreating guerrillas. Under the former reporting system, the ratio was better than three-to-one in favor of the government forces. Now, it is little more than two-to-one.

B. The guerrillas are stepping up their harassment of district capitals, and we have some reports that they have been ordered to seize and hold selected areas or villages for several days to dramatize their claimed change from a guerrilla force to a "Liberation Army."

X. The sponsors of the Viet Cong in Hanoi and Peiping are increasingly militant in their propaganda, but it is also evident that they are concerned about possible United States moves which might expand the war, and have made defensive preparations.

A. After the US air strikes on North Vietnam last August, the Chinese moved a regiment of jet aircraft--MIG-15s and 17s--to Hanoi

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and recently increased the number again to 53. The Chinese also more than doubled their own jet fighter strength in South and Southwest China, from 150 to more than 350. Some of these are MIG-19s, and there are a few MIG-21s.

- B. The Chinese have linked North Vietnam's air defense system with their own, and there are indications that the Chinese may assume defense of North Vietnamese air space.
1. There has been a concomitant increase in antiaircraft and radar installations, including the latest Chinese types of early warning equipment and ground-controlled intercept radars.
  2. At least one new airfield is being built and several established fields enlarged or improved in South China near the Vietnamese and Laotian borders.
- C. There has been no significant reinforcement of Chinese ground forces in this area, but there are already about 185,000 troops within 200 miles of the border which can move south on short notice.
- D. Peiping is in a position to turn up the heat in Southeast Asia with little or no warning,

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but we believe that these Chinese moves-- and the militant propaganda accompanying them--are primarily a bluff to deter the United States from enlarging the war.

Peiping is determined, however, to continue its support of the Communist insurgencies in Vietnam and Laos, and is probably prepared to meet limited escalation with military countermoves.

E. Soviet Premier Kosygin is leading a delegation of high military and economic officials to Hanoi. The trip probably foreshadows an increase in Soviet military assistance to North Vietnam.

1. The new Soviet leaders apparently hope that in return they can gain a greater voice in the formulation of Communist policy in Indochina. At any rate, the evidence of renewed Soviet interest in the area will be calculated to deter the US in any thoughts of carrying the war directly to North Vietnam.
2. Any Soviet military aid will probably be mainly of a defensive nature. Some Soviet antiaircraft weapons of a type

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we have not yet observed in China have already appeared in North Vietnam. Moscow might also offer surface-to-air missiles.

#### CONCLUSION

XI. About the only thing that can be said with certainty about the Vietnamese problem is that South Vietnam must have a stable and effective government, with the backing and confidence of the people, if the Viet Cong are to be halted and defeated.

A. The chronic political instability not only preoccupies the military leaders, but undermines provincial administration and the pacification effort. There are some able administrators, but they are already targets for Viet Cong terrorism and atrocities. In the first eight months of 1964, for instance, the Viet Cong murdered 428 and kidnapped 482 local administrative officials. That is enough of a mental handicap without the lack of direction and even purges which accompany the successive coups in Saigon

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- A. The Viet Cong do not run and hide in the jungle--they run and hide in the people.
- B. Until the Vietnamese peasants are given enough of a stake in the government, enough belief and confidence in it so that they will expose the guerrillas and help defeat them, the problem of South Vietnam is not going to show any improvement.
- C. Unless the negative political opportunists and the rival confessions realize that they must unite behind some government, they will just be delivering themselves into the hands of the Communists.

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